

VCP

I was never a great soldier. I guess I was average or at best – maybe, just above average – skilled, but not exceptional in any way.

But after saying that, I do like to think I had situational awareness. I believe I knew when we were cruising along and liked to think I understood when we were pushing our luck.

In hindsight, I must have infuriated Mac, 3-2 Bravo's commander, when, during patrols down town, I would start randomly changing direction or straying to within diving distance of a shit pit when things just didn't feel quite right.

It's correct to say we were all at risk in Somalia, regardless if you were sitting on the crapper behind BHQ or zigging and zagging while on patrol down town but, I personally didn't care as long as I was moving.

To me, movement meant safety, it meant we kept them guessing and made it harder for the bad guys to plot and plan.

But of course, what I liked had very little or nothing to do with it. We had a job to do and we did what was required, although, admittedly, at times, with a bit of bitching and moaning.

Out of all of the tasks asked of us while in Somalia, there was one I always felt uncomfortable doing – VCPs (vehicle check points).

We were stationary, had little or no cover and, unlike the water-point sleep-over's, we were up on the main roads for the whole world to see.

Of course we tried to make the VCPs as random as possible, but the fact remained, we had to cover the main roads into town.

To make matters worse, there were only a few places where we could effectively funnel the populace through a single point and keep a good footing. Result – we were predictable, and at risk.

Funnily enough though, gut feelings and thoughts of impending doom aside, the VCPs were very entertaining.

Gus and Polly were 3-2 Bravo's scouts. They were great mates and inseparable.

From behind the dodgy sand-bagged position at the Coke Factory VCP, I watched the two of them fart-arsing around beside the road, kicking a piece of metal back and forth.

It was early, the sun was still not up in the east but it was light enough and Mac had sent the scouts out to stand by the APC to be ready for our first vehicle checks of the day.

My Minimi was in front of me resting on the sandbags facing down the road past the boys and the APC.

Unusually, that day we were at section-plus strength and I was joined by Eato and J Conway from 3-2 Alpha who were beside me inspecting a Berreta rifle we had confiscated the night before.

The Coke Factory, with its own mosque and administration buildings, sat dormant beside the main road at the north-eastern extremity of town and, I'm sure, in its heyday, had been quite prosperous.

Although the VCP next to it shuffled around a bit, it was pretty much manned and in roughly the same place 24/7.

Silhouetted against the rising sun, I scanned one of the two-story buildings to see if I could pinpoint the position that our company-assigned sniper, Camel – may he rest in peace – was using to cover our VCP that day.

Of course, anybody who knew Camel would now smile and know that I was being an idiot. If Camel was on the job, then I had more chance of seeing a Ninja ride past on a dinosaur than spot his sniper hide.

"Heads up" somebody called.

I turned to see an ADF Land Rover heading towards us from town.

Thinking it might have been brass, Mac made a fuss and made sure everybody was half presentable with webbing on and not looking like the bags of shit we so obviously were.

Our interest in the newcomers was quickly lost as the Rover pulled up beside the scouts and three steel-pot-wearing diggers got out and started taking happy-snaps of the APC and Coke Factory main entrance.

Rock quickly dropped his webbing, re-lit his smoke and stated the obvious. "Fuckin' tourists."

As the last guy started to get back into the Rover, he looked at Gus and Polly, walked over, pointed to the ground, said something, then jumped in and sped off back down the road in a cloud of dust towards the airfield.

vehicle check points

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